

II. Infill Redevelopment Opportunities: An Overview

Given the robust nature of the Boston area real estate market in recent years and the overall appeal of Newton, it is reasonable to expect that some new development will occur in West Newton in the future. Recognizing this potential, we looked at ways to guide and manage this growth. In order to do so, we highlighted those parcels that are either underutilized or may be sensitive to development pressure in the future, and present opportunities to reinforce the village character. In general, these parcels fall into two categories: infill redevelopment opportunities on privately owned land and three parcels owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.

Infill redevelopment opportunities were identified where underutilized parcels disrupt the pedestrian-oriented streetscape of the village. Often these parcels have uses oriented to the automobile, and frequently these uses are in buildings set back from the street. The experience for the pedestrian in these areas would be greatly enhanced if there was an active storefront at these locations or even just an attractive structure that extends to the

sidewalk. Often these parcels are at the edges of the village center, just at a place where the traveler should be seeing clear signs that they are entering a pedestrian-oriented retail area where parking the car and walking to a business would be a comfortable experience. Instead, the traveler is bombarded with the visual overload of car dealerships, gas stations and private parking areas for light industrial activities.

While some manufacturing, light industry and auto-oriented uses are necessary for providing a service to nearby residents and jobs for working-class citizens, these activities need not be located in prominent sites at the edges of the village center. Therefore, some areas, such as Border Street, were not identified as underutilized. Border Street businesses seem to be appropriate uses for their location. While the street may need some improvement, the business mix provides a service and is outside the traditional walkable village and away from its prominent entry points.

Two types of underutilized parcels deserve special mention. The three parcels owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority are particularly vulnerable to change. The



Authority is interested in maximizing the value of their underutilized land, making them a more likely developer in the near-term than some of the private landowners in the village center. The parcels owned by the Turnpike Authority provide parking for commuters and business patrons. The largest of these sites, the West Turnpike Parcel is reviewed in more detail below.

Another type of underutilized parcel that deserves special mention is those located

at key focal points for travelers entering the village. The project team calls these points “gateway sites,” and they deserve special attention for their visual effect and influence on the character of the village as a whole. The largest conglomeration of Gateway parcels, the East Gateway, is also reviewed in more detail below.

INFILL REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

- Turnpike Authority Parcel
- Infill Development Opportunity



West Turnpike Parcel, existing condition



West Turnpike Parcel, existing access point

III. Guiding and Managing Growth: Site-Specific Proposals

A. West Turnpike Parcel

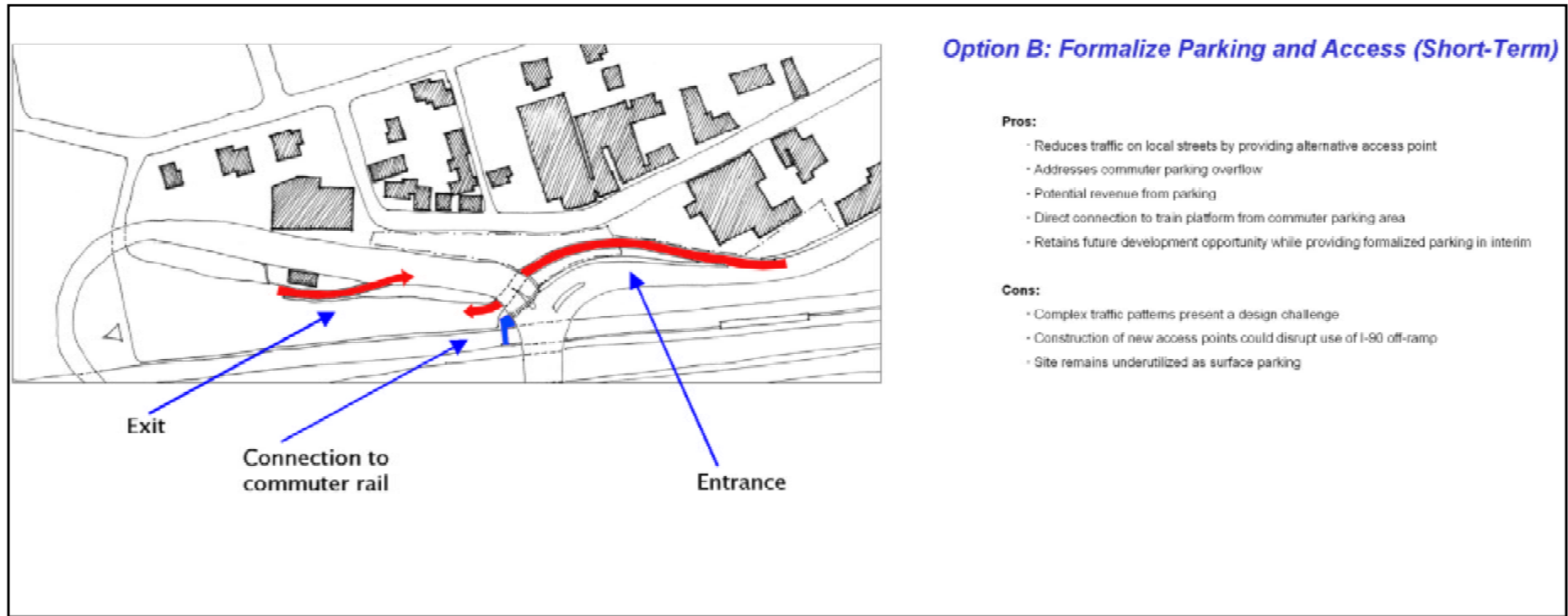
Site Characteristics

Located west of the village center, the largest of the three Turnpike-owned parcels is isolated from West Newton by the I-90 off-ramp and sits adjacent to the commuter rail line. The site, approximately 3 acres in size, is currently used as informal commuter parking, mainly for those commuters who know of its existence and seize the opportunity for free, all-day parking. In recent years, the Turnpike Authority has expressed interest in developing the site and is likely to revisit this development opportunity in the near future.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to the current use and design of the site. While the site provides much-needed commuter parking to those who know about it, it is both underutilized and an eyesore to the surrounding neighborhoods and passing motorists on I-90. One central challenge of the parcel is its disconnection from the rest of West

Newton, both in terms of its informal use and its physical isolation. The parcel's only vehicular access point is located in the northwestern corner, which requires all vehicles to pass through an adjacent residential area rather than enter the site more directly from the village center. Moreover, the I-90 off-ramp presents an obstacle to a pedestrian-friendly connection to the site from the village center. Pedestrian access from the site to the commuter rail platform is currently possible yet the indirect route is not the safest or particularly convenient. Pedestrians must walk up to the off-ramp overpass with heavy automobile traffic and then down a stairway to the platform on the opposite side of the tracks.

One possible option would be to maintain the current use of the site. However, for the reasons outlined above - the site's isolation from the village center, lack of revenue-generation and insufficient vehicle and pedestrian access - there is much room for improvement upon existing conditions. The major focus of the project team's short- and long-term options is therefore to establish better links between the parcel and both the village center and the commuter rail stop. The team also



seeks to identify opportunities to better capture the value of the site while respecting the context of West Newton.

Short-term Proposal

In addition to leaving the parcel as is, a second possible option would be to upgrade and formalize the provision of parking on the parcel. Any effort to intensify parking will first have to address the access constraints of the parcel. One way to address these issues would be to shift the access to the parcel from its current location in the northwest corner to sepa-

rate entrance and exit points in the northeast corner. In the proposed scenario, vehicles would enter underneath the existing I-90 off-ramp by way of a new extension of Washington Street, which would run through the Turnpike-owned land between Border Street and the end of Washington Street. Vehicles would exit onto the existing off-ramp, east of the former tollbooth building. (above)

The existing elevation difference between the off-ramp and the site ranges from approximately 8 feet to 20 feet, depending on the location. This allows for a

feasible solution that permits vehicles to enter underneath the off-ramp at the greatest elevation difference (approximately 15-20 feet). At the same time, the lowest elevation difference (approximately 8-12 feet) would permit the construction of a ramp to bring exiting vehicles back into the flow of traffic on the off-ramp.

Construction of a walkway to the edge of the tracks and an at-grade crossing to the existing train platform on the opposite side of the tracks would enable a direct connection between the parcel

and the train platform. The walkway and crossing would provide an alternative to accessing the platform from the bridge above. In the long run, however, a more sensible alternative would be to shift the train platform to the north side of the tracks so that it is adjacent to the parcel and the proposed walkway.

There are many advantages to the proposed strategy. First, the proposed changes would better address commuter-parking overflow while mitigating its traffic impact on nearby residential uses. Second, regulation of parking on the site by an overseeing authority - such as the Turnpike, the MBTA or the City of Newton - could offer opportunities for revenue-generation. Third, a direct connection to the train platform not only would facilitate access to the commuter rail from parking facilities but would enable compliance with the accessibility requirements of the American Disabilities Act. Most importantly, this proposal could serve as an interim strategy by providing formalized parking in short-term while retaining the opportunity for future development.

Long-term Proposal

Upgrading and formalizing parking on the

parcel would offer an improvement on existing conditions, but surface parking of any sort falls short of utilizing the full development potential of the site. While the parcel is an appropriate location for development, it is important to ensure that future development respects the context of the surrounding area and, to the extent possible, retains public parking. Moreover, guiding development in such a way that it engages the village center, rather than turning its back on it, would help establish a connection between the site and the rest of West Newton.

Given these assumptions, the project team's long-term proposal suggests development that covers roughly half of the site and stands no more than six stories tall. In an effort to establish a connection with the village center, we propose development on the eastern half of the parcel while maintaining parking on the western half. In addition, it may be possible to provide parking on the lower levels of any proposed structure.

Easy access to the site from both I-90 and the commuter rail make it an ideal location for commercial space or a modest-sized hotel. An active daytime use

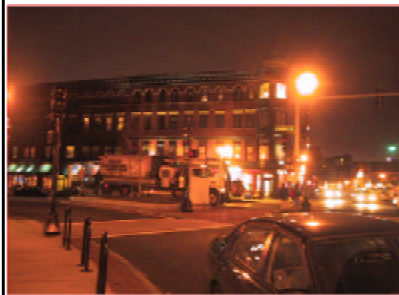
Option C: Future Development (Long-Term)

Pros:

- Easy access by commuter rail and highway
- Opportunity for increased tax revenue for the City of Newton
- Potential link to village center and possible development on nearby turnpike parcel
- Retains public parking on a portion of the site
- Visual landmark for vehicles passing on I-90

Cons:

- Context-sensitive scale may be difficult to reconcile with financial feasibility
- May require additional traffic mitigation measures



Development on the eastern half of the parcel



Café on nearby Turnpike parcel

of the site might complement any future development, for example, a small café, on the smaller Turnpike parcel to the east, as illustrated above.

Advantages of this proposal include fostering a link to the village center and generating additional tax revenue for the City of Newton. The location of the parcel also offers the opportunity for creating a more positive visual landmark for vehicles passing on I-90. Retaining a portion of the parcel for public parking would address the need for weekday commuter parking and also accommodate any additional

parking demands on the weekends.

Implementation

While certainly feasible, both of the proposals outlined above present some implementation challenges. The integration of the proposed access into existing traffic patterns presents both design and traffic-management challenges that may require additional traffic-mitigation measures. Moreover, the temporary disruption resulting from the construction of new access points only adds to the complexity of the traffic challenges. In addition, encouraging a scale of development that is context-sensitive may be dif-

ficult to reconcile with real estate finance concerns. In addition to these considerations, other institutional factors may affect the development process. These factors include:

- The city's ability to reach an agreement, perhaps a memorandum of understanding, with the Turnpike Authority, who maintains control of the land.
- The need for coordination between Wards 3 and 4 because the parcel straddles the border of these jurisdictions.
- The ability of the city to coordinate a zoning designation for the parcel with its vision for future development on the site.

B. *East Gateway*

Site Characteristics

The East Gateway is an area of thirteen parcels on the eastern end of the West Newton study area. The site was chosen as an example of the potential positive and negative effects that could result from parcel assembly and redevelopment on the fringes of the West Newton business district. The project team named the site “East Gateway” because it serves as the eastern edge to the West Newton village. As a successful gateway, a development on this site would welcome and engage visitors to the village in vehicles or on foot.

While many stakeholders identified this as an area that they believed would never change, the project team found the forces for change on this site to be much more compelling. The structures and uses on this site may not change for many years, but higher-value uses combined with the limited number of available development sites in the city may lead the owners of this site to re-evaluate development. The West Newton project team also believes that a proactive planning process in the neighborhood could encourage develop-

ment that creates a more desirable village gateway than what exists there today.

While the project team identified other underutilized parcels for redevelopment, and while these sites may be prime candidates for redevelopment, no other privately-owned site offered such a significant potential to change the village character for better or worse. Therefore, the team focused on this gateway to begin a dialogue about redevelopment. This dialogue can be applied to other underutilized parcels as well.

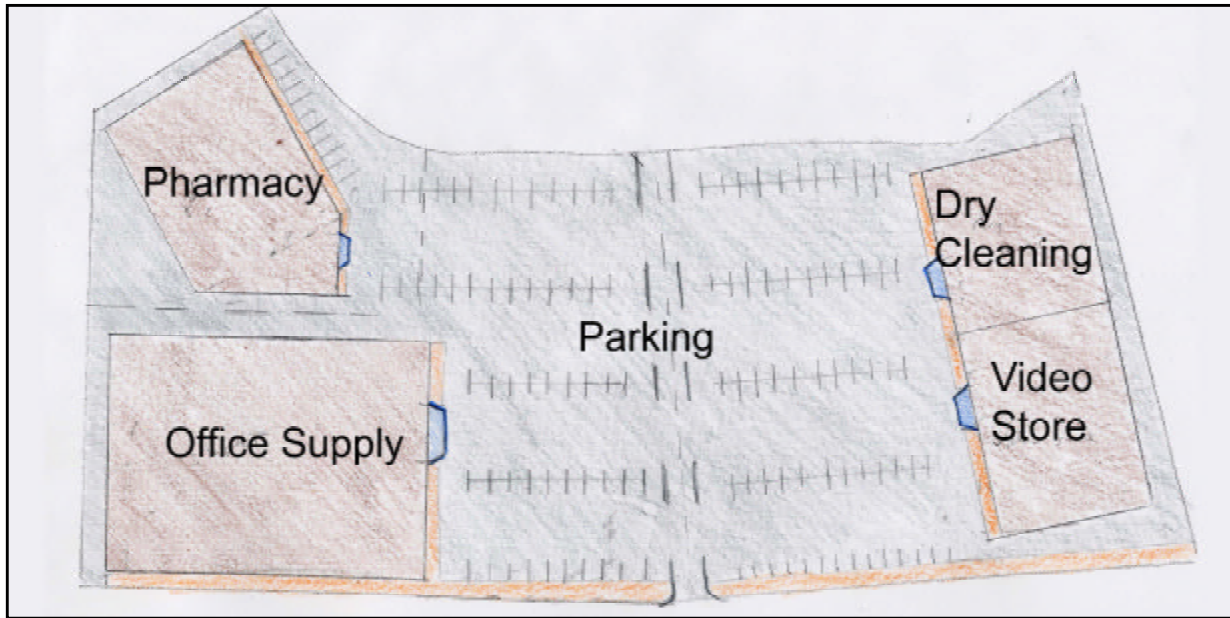
The thirteen-parcel East Gateway site has five owners. Four parcels are owned by individuals, while the other nine are held by the same family. The nine combined parcels alone comprise over 75 percent of the site. The entire site has an assessed value of approximately \$5 million. It is 3.5 acres in size and is currently zoned as Business 1 and Business 2, with a zoning change crossing through the site. Currently the site includes a number of disconnected uses including automobile rental and sales agencies, office buildings and light industry. The majority of the site is paved for parking. Narrow streets on the north and south side along with

an informal circulation pattern through the site create complications in vehicle navigation. On the north border of the site is the Cheesecake Brook, an underutilized and under-appreciated neighborhood asset. While the street in front of the site has street trees, on-site landscaping and amenities are minimal. Although the economics would require a significant amount of development for changes to occur here, there are opportunities to bring more profitable, higher-value uses to the site.

Project Principles

The project team identified six principles for development of the East Gateway site:

1. The site should include a context-sensitive site plan that respects the village center nearby and the residential neighborhood on the opposite side of the Cheesecake Brook.
2. The development project should highlight the natural features of the parcel including the Cheesecake Brook and the grade changes between Washington Street and Watertown Street.
3. The site should include a compact village-style development that will capitalize on the existing resources within walking distance of the site.
4. The site should establish a well-defined eastern edge signaling arrival into the West Newton village center.
5. The site should offer a mix of uses, if possible.
6. The site should include some on-site affordable housing if possible, allowing the opportunity to broaden the age and income diversity of the West Newton village while bringing Newton closer to compliance with state affordable housing requirements.



could be separated into three developments. Each development has a building with less than 20,000 square feet. This type of development would trigger a site-plan review, but would not require a special permit. While each building is set on the street, this street-front side could be a blank wall, while entrances are off parking lots. A large portion of the frontage on Washington Street is simply the parking lot. The total development has an FAR of 0.5, and includes a video store and dry cleaner on the eastern side, a pharmacy with its back on Watertown Street and an office-supply store on the western side of the parcel.



A freestanding chain-store pharmacy is allowed by-right under current zoning

By-right development could be manipulated on this site to allow for undesirable uses and site layout.

Existing Potential: Undesirable As-of-Right Development

The project team reviewed the opportunities allowed through zoning for by-right development on the site. The first example (above) offered shows a path of least resistance, a profitable by-right development of modern chain stores. The project team believes that this would be an undesirable outcome. By combining the site into three larger parcels, the development

Obviously, this site plan violates every one of the six principles for redevelopment. Furthermore, these stores would likely be national or regional chains that would compete with the local businesses that are the backbone of the West Newton village center. Finally, this scenario is a huge generator of short automobile trips that will augment the congestion problem in the village center. However, this is just the type of development that is encouraged by the existing zoning code on the edges of the West Newton village district.

In an effort to highlight more desirable

options for the site, the project team developed three other alternatives. Any of these alternatives could be encouraged by supportive residents and political leaders through a planning and visioning process as well as by improving existing zoning. Although these projects may still require special permits, a more participatory vision for these parcels could be an opportunity to see permit applications that have more support from area residents and leaders.

Option A: Mixed Use with Townhouses and Park

This option (next page) shows a two-story brick building fronting on Washington Street and wrapping around Dunstan Street and Davis Court. The total FAR is 0.7. This building mirrors the existing two-story brick structure across Washington Street. The eastern corner has a three-story rounded edge that identifies the gateway to the village center. The two stories of this building could be any of a number of uses:

- Retail with housing above
- Retail with office above
- Office with housing above
- Office on all floors

Housing on the second floor of the building could include up to 24 units. Behind the building is a road with 13 attached townhouses, each with 3000 square feet of living space. Dunstan Street and Davis Court have been expanded onto the private property and include a number of new on-street parking spaces. Washington Street is over ten feet higher than the center of the site. This grade difference allows for a service road between the townhouses and the front buildings that can offer access to parking below the front building (in the basement level) for the users of both floors of this building. Parking for the townhouses can also be off this access road to garages at the back of the townhouses or through street parking. The project also establishes a new public park with access to Cheesecake Brook. The brook would be exposed in this area to create a visual water feature that would accentuate the area for residents of the development and the nearby neighborhood.

This project meets the established principles for redeveloping the site.



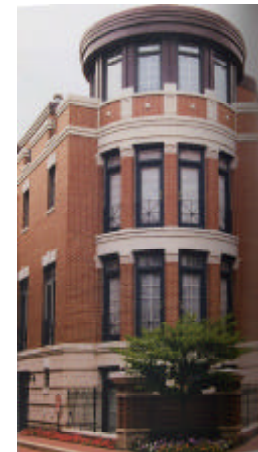
Parking would be behind the buildings, accessible from the service road.



Townhouses would provide needed housing in an attractive setting.



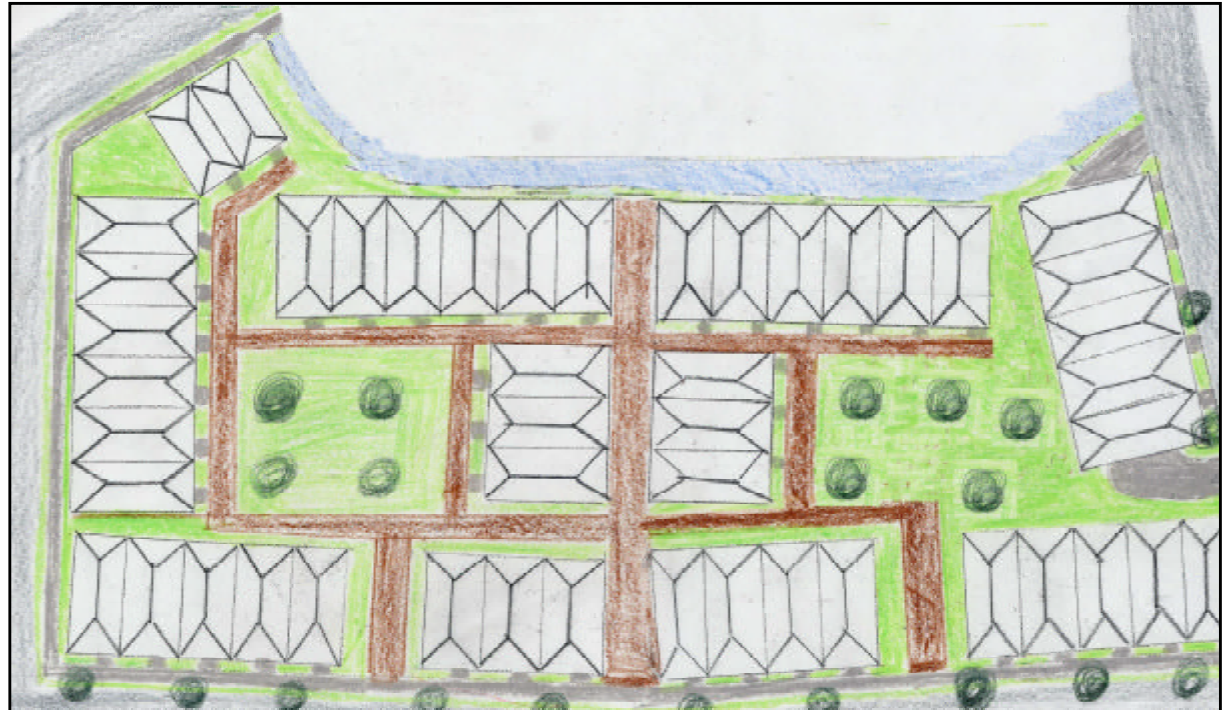
Option A: This alternative would provide for a two-story mixed-use buildings on Washington Street, townhouses, and a park. A corner tower could serve as a landmark; the service road could be accessible through an attractive arch.



Option B: Townhouses

This option has 48 townhouses on the site. The FAR for this project is 1.0. Parking is underneath the entire development with entrance and exit ramps from Dunstan Street. The townhouses surround two large courtyards built over the parking garage. Underground connections allow direct access to the units from the parking garage. Each townhouse is two stories tall and includes approximately 3000 square feet of living space. As with Option A, Dunstan Street and Davis Court are expanded for better traffic flow. The grade change on the site would require careful re-grading and staggering of townhouse heights.

This development has several advantages including the concealing of parking in a garage, the surplus of parking beyond existing requirements and the potential for use as senior citizen or affordable housing. The addition of 48 dwelling units will also create a new market of residents for the village business district within walking distance. However, the development does not meet all the principles for development. It does not include new retail or office space. While it is suburban in character, its density substantially exceeds that of the abutting residential neighborhoods.



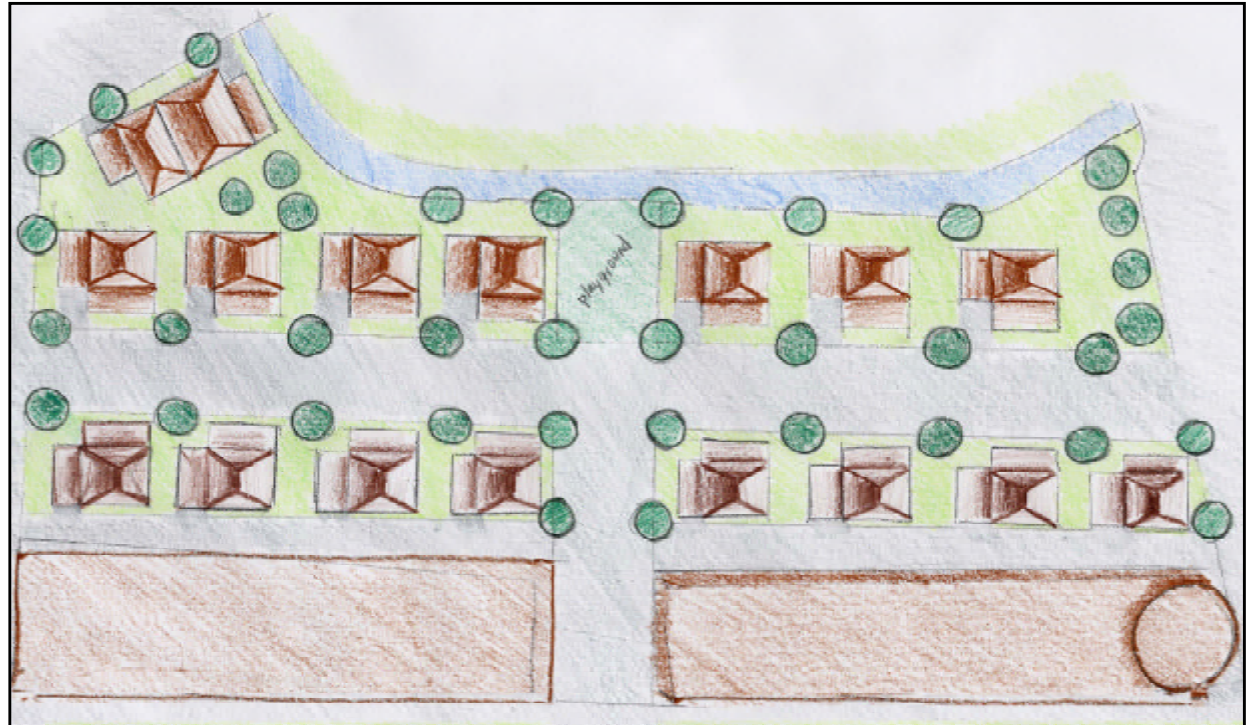
Parking is provided in garages underneath the entire development



Attractive townhouses are in varied styles and surround landscaped courtyards



Attractive single family homes match the grain of the abutting neighborhood.



Option C: Mixed Use with Single Family Homes

The third option includes buildings along Washington Street similar to those in Option A, but without the ends that wrap around the side streets. It has an FAR of 0.5. Dunstan Street and Davis Court would be expanded for traffic flow. A new street with 17 single-family homes would be located behind the Washington Street buildings. Each house would have 2400

square feet of living space and a small driveway and one-car garage. This development would have a community playground next to the Cheesecake Brook. The remainder of the brook would run through the backyards of half the dwellings in the development.

This development meets the spirit of most of the principles for the development site. The development has a single-family character that most accurately reflects the

abutting neighborhood. While this proposal successfully provides both a residential character and a retail block that reflect their abutters, it is probably more financially challenging for a developer than options A or B.

Conclusion

Any or all of these alternatives to the by-right option provide opportunities for redevelopment of this strategic site that encompass the spirit of the framework plan and the principles set out by the project team. While the financial feasibility of such projects would need to be reviewed in more detail, a cursory review of finances suggests that Option B, and probably Option A could be financially viable.

The community may find one of these projects more appealing than others, find elements of each project most appealing or find that there are other, more suitable, options that have not been explored by the project team. Regardless of the outcome, the community leaders and the Department of Planning and Community Development should take the time to review the potential redevelopment opportunities for this site and use the outcome of this pro-

cess to guide planning decisions on other underutilized sites. With application of the framework plan and a solid set of planning principles, the process should yield alternatives that are appealing to the community, achievable financially and supported by the site owner.

IV. Regulatory Tools and Strategies

A. Zoning Techniques

The lack of any village-specific standards, while not inherently harmful, does leave the door open for development that is incompatible with the village character in terms of use, scale, or design. It also creates some barriers by mandating parking and setback standards more appropriate to residential neighborhoods or highway strip development. For example, as illustrated in the East Gateway example in the previous section, any national chain store could build as-of-right yet another ubiquitous concrete box at the back of a lot with a vast impermeable parking surface in front. All that the developer would have to do is propose an allowed use of a small enough size to escape the special permitting process. On the scale of a single lot, this would interrupt the street wall and increase hazards to pedestrians. On the scale of multiple lots, this could be the end of the village center.

One way to address this would be through the creation of village-specific land use regulation. This could function as a zoning designation specific to West Newton, as a more generic citywide ‘village center’

zoning designation, or as a design overlay. The former two options would govern all facets of land use, including height, setbacks, uses, parking ratios, and so on. The latter would govern physical design only.

Between the former two options, the difference lies in the level of specificity. Zoning designations created specifically for the area could take into account its individual character, topography, and access. New zones for each village center, however, would be both laborious to create and complex to administer. A single village-center designation could address major concerns without creating such a situation. Or, the two means could be combined through the creation of a generic, interim village-center designation, for use citywide, to allow sufficient time for specific plans to be done. Similarly, a design overlay could be installed in the short-term while the larger question of uses is fully debated.

While it would ultimately make sense to review and revise permitted uses within the village center, those currently allowed are generally compatible with village character. The question is rather one of scale and physical form. Tools to achieve the desired outcome could include in-lieu

parking fees, enhanced site plan review, design review, transitional zones, and vertical zoning.

Existing parking ratios are generally reasonable in the context of West Newton: transit access exists, but the level of service is somewhat low. The requirement to provide two parking spaces per dwelling unit may be found to be unnecessary within the village center itself. The requirement to provide parking on-site, however, puts limits on the dense, clustered development typical of the village form. While such parking requirements have been waived in the past, it is preferable to formalize the system.

One means of maintaining adequate levels of parking and allowing development to continue is by instituting a fee in-lieu of payment system. Under such a scheme, developers can pay a fee roughly equivalent to the cost of constructing a parking space, which is later used in the purchase and development of a municipal parking lot or structure. Such a scheme has the additional benefit of facilitating shared parking while reducing the ultimate number of spaces necessary.

Two innovative zoning techniques that

have been applied in other municipalities are transitional zoning and vertical zoning. Transitional zoning provides for a buffer zone, typically consisting of multi-family housing, to create a smooth transition from a more active town center to areas of single-family housing. Vertical zoning provides for a higher level of scrutiny on the first floor of a development, to ensure that design and use contributes to a lively pedestrian environment.

Issues of scale, use, and design could be addressed through either an enhanced site plan review process or the creation of a design review process. Site plan review could be activated by a change in use or a change in parking demand, allowing for some degree of control and negotiation.

B. Design Controls

There are many design elements that are important to have in a village center that may or may not be desired outside the district. These elements include more selective allowed uses, minimal building setbacks, “hidden” parking, first floor building transparency and the number of building entrances. Specific building-design factors, such as material choices and roof types, can also be proscribed for a village

center. Additional elements are given in the design guidelines mentioned in Appendix C.

Desired setbacks can include minimum and maximum distances from the parcel line. Minimum setbacks create an inviting pedestrian environment by bringing the storefronts to the pedestrian instead of hiding farther back on the lot, making them less accessible to people walking by.

Transparency is the amount of a building’s first floor that is transparent, or can be seen through. A minimum standard can be set in order to increase the interaction between the pedestrian and the stores. Transparency not only allows for pedestrians to see inside, but it allows business owners to act as watchmen for the street. Pedestrians can window shop when buildings have minimal setbacks and open fronts making a walk across the area seem shorter than it actually is.

Placing on-site parking next to or behind a building prevents the street wall from being severely interrupted. On-site parking of any kind requires a curb cut that will interrupt the street wall, but side or rear parking minimizes this disruption.

It is possible for large buildings to have

a single entrance serving multiple occupants. This creates an indoor mall, taking the storefronts off the street and placing them in a mall-like atmosphere. These buildings often have poor transparency, since storefronts are not on the street itself, creating an unfriendly sidewalk. One method that can be used to prevent this effect is if each retail establishment has its own front door on the street.

Design guidelines regulating style or building material can also be used to create a uniform streetscape. Although this tool can be used to prevent out-of-place buildings from disrupting the neighborhood, they can also create sterile, uninteresting environments. It is most appropriate for neighborhoods with pronounced historic character. These design considerations can be incorporated into any type of design restriction technique that is chosen. They can ensure that the village center continues to be a pleasant place to stroll while serving the changing interests of business owners and developers.

Samples of design guidelines and interesting zoning techniques can be found in Appendix D: Examples of Design Guidelines and Zoning Techniques.

CHAPTER 5: NEXT STEPS

I. Implementation Plan

Upon completion of a consulting project, the consultant leaves the community and all too often the project documentation is assigned to a shelf where it sits and collects dust. The project team believes that the recommendations in this report, although not refined for immediate implementation, lay the groundwork for a planning and visioning process that can bring new vigor to the West Newton community and its village center.

Although some ideas may need further discussion and refinement, the project team has provided implementation suggestions for the projects as they are defined, to ensure that the Newton Department of Planning and Community Development can take the next steps required to bring these plans to fruition.

II. Short-term Recommendations

A. Enhancing the Village Character

The most important first step for enhancing the village character is not simply the placement of signs and benches. Success also requires human resources. The

Department of Planning and Community Development and the Board of Aldermen should work to both empower the West Newton Advisory Committee and create a West Newton Business Association to address issues and advocate for a stronger village character.

Clear signage for arrival points and way-finding would help enhance the village character. Properly placed signs will inform the visitor that they have arrived in West Newton and that West Newton is a special place. The city should secure funds for new “Welcome to West Newton” signage at gateway locations. As one option for funding this project, the West Newton Advisory Committee could explore the use of CDBG funds. An alternative funding scheme would be for private businesses to sponsor these signs. This should be done with care, as excess advertising on the welcome sign may distract from the underlying message. If these funds are not available, public funds should be found for this initial element.

Signs for parking can be funded from general revenue or from a dedicated stream of parking revenue from West Newton parking tickets and meter fees. The planning

department should work with the appropriate departments to address this issue and ensure that clear access to parking is provided for all visitors to the village.

Street maintenance issues are also a concern. Maintenance of public open space is a community effort that brings together town leaders and concerned citizens. A committed business community should work to keep the areas in front of their businesses clean. A more structured organized volunteer corps can be initiated, if necessary.

B. Creating a Pedestrian-Friendly Streetscape

The addition of traffic islands, street lamps, human-scaled lights and additional benches can be funded through a variety of sources. One popular model is the National Main Streets Program, which is supported by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and enacted in many small communities as well as larger cities such as Boston. The National Trust recommends following a four-point comprehensive approach to create and sustain a district image. The steps are:

- Community Organization
- Promotion
- Design
- Economic Restructuring

The City of Boston has much more information on these steps on its Main Streets web site. Even if Newton does not adopt an official Main Streets program, the city could borrow elements of this program that have been successful in revitalizing many communities with problems that are much greater than those in West Newton.

Another element of the Main Streets program is the 'Corporate Buddy' Program. This program offers a corporation advertising and good press for supporting the district. The buddy business contributes \$10,000 each year for four years towards expenses for a village improvement district. One potential "buddy" for West Newton could be the Boston Sports Club, an organization with significant profits in recent years that is looking for good publicity and could use the opportunity to balance out the negative parking impacts that may occur from their arrival in West Newton

C. Greenspace Enhancements

Keeping new park areas in good order is a key to the success of these spaces. Institutionalizing a working relationship between the Department of Planning and Community Development and other city departments while focusing on the improvement of West Newton may ensure that these areas remain clean and green. Regular meetings of these participants would allow for the opportunity to discuss future plantings, plant rotations and landscape design. Partners include:

- Public Works Department: provision of gardening tools, mulch, bulbs, etc.
- Law Department: provision of labor (i.e., delinquent youths who are required to put hours into social work)
- Police Department: to patrol for vandalism
- Citizen Volunteer Groups: these groups could help with maintenance with equipment provided by the Public Works Department

The proposed village gardens project, a newly upgraded park area in front of CVS, could be implemented through leveraging CDBG funds that are available to West

Newton. The John Ryan Memorial Park renovation could also leverage CDBG funds as well as citizen donations. Citizens who donate for the park could have their names imprinted on bricks in the new park area to acknowledge their donations. While non-profit organizations often use this strategy, it can also be used by Newton to raise money for improving a village asset. The city should also encourage citizen involvement and leadership in the process of developing and implementing the plans for these areas.

D. Zoning and Design

The Department of Planning and Community Development should work, with the support of the Board of Aldermen, to institute a system for design guidelines and to provide for the recommended overlay districts for village zoning. While this is a short-term priority, it will influence long-term changes in the village character. The Department should review the recommendations of the MIT team examining the city's permitting process and should work to follow their steps for developing zoning changes.

Concurrent with the new zoning should be the establishment of a design review process. This review process should provide developers with design guidelines. Even before design review is initiated, the provision of good design guidelines for developers can create an atmosphere that will help developers understand what is wanted. The Department should review examples of design guidelines from other communities, establish a draft and run test scenarios based on the draft. The refined guidelines should be approved by the Board of Aldermen.

E. Parking

The Planning Department should make it a priority to meet with the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority to come to agreement on at least the short-term provision of commuter parking in the village center. If commuter parking can be provided in designated Turnpike-owned lots, and if the small Turnpike lot between Putnam and Washington Streets can have a more formalized parking arrangement, this could help the business district by providing for greater vehicle turnover in the parking areas.

III. Long-term Recommendations

Redevelopment of underutilized parcels can begin with a community visioning process that involves all stakeholders, including the parcel owners. In some cases, such as at the East Gateway site, there would be significant economic benefit gained from assembling parcels under different ownership. The Department of Planning and Community Development can assist with this process. With a proactive stance from the Planning Department towards landowners at the underutilized sites, particularly the gateway sites, the community can have a better chance of ensuring that these developers are not working with national chain retailers to bring an as-of-right development that would be detrimental to the district.

The West Turnpike parcel is a high priority site. Redevelopment plans for this site will require coordination between the Aldermen of Wards 3 and 4 because the parcel straddles the line between these Wards. Newton should look to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would guide Turnpike development on this site and provide for stipulations that will allow for zoning changes beyond trans-

portation uses. This site could also benefit from a community visioning process where community members are allowed to envision development that they would tolerate and support on the site. Involvement of design professionals, who understand the feasibility of development from finance, traffic engineering and architectural perspectives, would be helpful. The early involvement of the community would reduce conflicts later in this process. The Department should also engage in discussions with the MBTA about possible collaboration on this site. Moving the train platform next to the Turnpike parcel would allow the MBTA to improve access from nearby parking and come into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The MBTA should be an active player in all decisions on the west Turnpike parcel.

With the continued support of the Mayor and the planning department, the tireless advocacy of the Board of Aldermen and an expanded role for the local community and business interest, it is possible for West Newton to achieve its full potential.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: NATURAL ASSETS AND PHYSIOGRAPHY

West Newton enjoys an abundance of natural assets. They include topographical variation in landscape, which creates delightful drops and rises along its terrain and provides the opportunity for the innovative use of slopes in building construction. The area is also rich in surface water features such as Cheesecake Brook and Dolan Pond. In addition, various horticultural species, most notably oak, maple, acacia, linden, and elm, are scattered throughout West Newton, visibly thickening as one enters the residential areas to the north.

The cumulative effect of these natural assets in West Newton enhances landscape aesthetics. Perhaps more importantly, they safeguard the livelihoods of insects, birds, and small mammals that depend on them and allow for a sustainable ecosystem within the region. Environmental sensibility and efforts toward environmental sustainability must be integrated into the planning process in order to effectively preserve and promote current assets. Environmental awareness will also provide a setting for social interaction, sharing, and a sense of community. The following section explores some of West Newton's natural assets in more detail.

Physiography: A Basic Overview

To gain a broader understanding of the different types of terrain, resources, and environmental conditions that make up the landscape of West Newton, we present a brief survey of its current physiography. The physiology of any region represents the product of a host of processes that operate at or near the earth's surface, which have developed over various periods of time. Physiographic regions are defined by the composite patterns of the main elements of landscape: landforms, drainage features, soils, climate, vegetation, and land use. Landscape as we observe it today represents an evolving picture - at this moment a mere slice of the terrestrial environment at the intersection of many time lines representing different forces and systems.

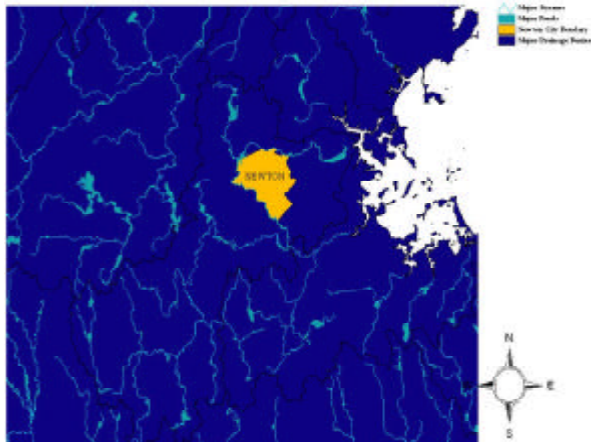
Newton and the surrounding region belong within the physiographic province of the Northern Appalachians, which stretches from the northern edge of New York to the Gaspé Peninsula in Newfoundland, Canada. The Northern Appalachians are geologically complex, made up of several separate mountain ranges composed principally of crystalline rocks. Due to the

effects of glaciation, abundant rock exposures and an irregular cover of glacial deposits characterize this region. Details are documented in the Framework, as quoted below:

The area of what is now Newton lay under water just 350-400 million years ago. The last glacier receded from this area only about 14,000 years ago. At this point the City's surface ranges from a few feet above sea level to more than 300 feet elevation, contains 14 lakes and 14 miles of Charles River frontage, and has a rich variety of forms of surface geology including drumlins, eskers, outwash plains, nearly 300 acres of wetlands, and numerous slopes of 15% or more.

The climate is noted for its long, cold winters. Natural vegetative cover consists of a mixture of boreal and hardwood forests. Throughout much of the region, extensive outcrops of resistant rock exert a strong influence on drainage. These outcrops vary in shape and size, imparting an almost chaotic fabric, thus creating very irregular drainage as seen in the preceding map. Charles River forms half of the city's geopolitical boundaries, reflecting the irregular drainage pattern.

Map of Drainage Patterns in the Vicinity of Newton.



Given this larger frame of reference, we will now explore the current geomorphic features of West Newton and identify existing opportunities and constraints according to three themes: drainage patterns, landforms, and vegetation. In addition, some elements of West Newton's built environment that enhance and complement its natural assets are identified. Understanding the various forces that have shaped, and are currently shaping, the landscape of West Newton is crucial in developing site-specific plans in the future.

Natural Assets of West Newton



Waterways: Cheesecake Brook and Dolan Pond

Cheesecake Brook and Dolan Pond represent significant bodies of water in West Newton. The former is a natural asset that is currently not being utilized to its full potential, and the latter is an encouraging example of how a natural asset can best be preserved and promoted.

In West Newton, Cheesecake Brook flows parallel to Watertown Street to the northeast until it reaches Linwood Park in Nonantum. It then bends north and enters the Charles River. There is an existing dirt path through a scenic stretch of wooded

riverbank from Bridge Street in Nonantum to Cheesecake Brook. Where this path ends at the Brook, the Boston Metropolitan District Commission is proposing to build a new footbridge as part of its ongoing Upper Charles River Reservation Project. The footbridge (10 to 12 feet wide, and approximately 125 long) will run over the Charles River, connecting to woodland on the opposite bank in Watertown. Within West Newton, however, Cheesecake Brook has been modified to conform to the built environment in one way or another. The Brook is made to flow through a subterranean concrete aqueduct. It first emerges from beneath Watertown Street, but even at ground level the Brook is engineered to run through a linear concrete ditch. Thus it is underappreciated both as a natural asset and as an aesthetic hot spot.

In order to enhance the value of Cheesecake Brook as a precious natural asset, the Brook decidedly needs to be integrated back into its riparian ecosystem. This ecosystem consists of the flowing water, the embankments, vegetation in and out of the water, and aquatic life forms. Currently, the Brook runs along a concrete ditch and cannot seep directly

into the ground surrounding it. This prevents the Brook from 1) replenishing the underground water resource, which in turn nurtures the entire region in times of water scarcity; and 2) controlling the influx of stormwater in times of water surplus, thereby undermining its effectiveness as a stormwater retention mechanism. Restoring the riparian ecosystem surrounding the Brook would also provide much aesthetic and recreational value to the local population. This would enhance the village character of West Newton and make it an even more attractive destination. Cheesecake Brook could potentially be activated as a natural buffer for homes adjacent to industrial zones if the riparian ecosystem incorporates trees and shrubs along its embankments.

In contrast, Dolan Pond succeeds in maximizing its value as an important natural and cultural asset to the residents of West Newton. The Pond serves as an important recreational spot for West Newton residents, and maintains a sound balance between preservation and promotion. The success of Dolan Pond is due to the efforts of civic organizations such as the Friends of Dolan Pond, whose values are expressed below:

A 1995 naturalist's resource survey report concluded that Dolan Pond Conservation Area provides unique habitat for both wildlife and a variety of plant species that are rare within the City of Newton. Although only 8 acres in extent, the area provides a mosaic of environmental conditions that encourages biological diversity. Although the majority of the conservation area is dominated by red maple swamp, the interspersed open water, scrub/shrub thickets and wet meadow/vegetated swales provides for a rich wildlife habitat. The 1995 report stated that Dolan Pond was a "very special jewel with the City of Newton's open space system."

Landforms

As previously mentioned in the Physiography section, the effects of glaciation on the landscape on West Newton can be observed today as a rich variety of surface geomorphology. Though the topographical terrain of West Newton is flatter and lower compared to West Newton Hill, it reveals a surprising wealth of topographical variation when examined on a parcel-specific scale. The gradients, slopes, and variations in height in many of the parcels

in West Newton offer unique benefits to future built structures. Natural gradients encourage innovative approaches to concealing less attractive features of the built environment. For instance, they can offer convenient placement of parking spaces and/or certain industrial/commercial operations. Height differences also shelter residential areas from the view of main street traffic, and can minimize the visible bulk of tall buildings.

One geomorphological constraint to West Newton, however, is the Massachusetts Turnpike running adjacent to its southern side. The Turnpike disrupts the natural terrain as it rolls down a steep gradient from West Newton Hill to West Newton (refer to the Map of Natural Assets). It also serves as a kind of artificial chasm between the two neighborhoods. This necessitates getting from one side to the other via a highway ramp, as well as a mental understanding that one needs to "cross over" the Turnpike to get to the "other side." This artificial, yet nevertheless physical and psychological boundary dramatically severs West Newton from the rest of Newton lying south of the Turnpike, affecting the way future development will take place. Future development in West

Newton must deal with this “chasm” as a major geomorphic constraint, and consider ways of bridging this chasm.

Vegetation

The self-selection of native vegetation varies depending upon the climate, soil, water resources, and drainage patterns of a particular region. West Newton has a relatively mild climate favorable to a variety of natural vegetation. Hardwood, deciduous forests are most prevalent but meadow and riparian vegetation are also present. West Newton also supports a wide mix of horticultural species. The mild climate and ample water enable trees to grow to specimens of great girth and admirable stature. This is most readily observed in the residential alcoves to the north of Webster and Watertown Streets, but also on the Unitarian Church grounds and along Border Street. The trees are, however, slow growing due to long winters and snow. They require extended periods of maturation and thereby long-term maintenance.

Elements of the Built Environment that Enhance Natural Assets

In addition to the various natural assets highlighted above, West Newton has a number of landuses and infrastructure that enhance the natural ecosystem. There are playing fields to the north of Washington Street, which generate recreational activities. Davis Court is a narrow dirt road mainly used by pedestrians to connect Watertown and Washington Streets. It is agreeably populated with sumacs and walnut trees. The steep gradient rising from Border Street onto the turnpike ramp accommodates various deciduous shrubs and trees. In addition, Washington Street, Watertown Street, and virtually all streets in the single-family residential areas are embellished by a variety of street trees.

APPENDIX B: PARKING CAPACITY

Table of Results of Parking Study on November 8 and November 10 in West Newton

Street	Side	Block	Thursday Total Spots Available	9:30	12:00	17:00	Sat 19:45	11:30	18:30	21:00
Watertown St										
	South	Bens to opp Eden	7	9	5	0	1	3	3	4
	North	CVS to Eden	9	4	6	4	2	3	9	5
	South	opp Eden to opp Davis	12	11	14	3	4	1	2	8
	North	Eden to Davis	12	6	6	7	4	2	2	7
	South	opp Davis to opp Adell	27	0	3	8	3	0	3	3
	North	Davis to Adell	20	2	2	5	4		2	2
Washington St										
	North	Elm westbound	10	3	18	9	7	7	10	
	South	Rt 16E to Tody's & Church	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
	North	Elm to Cherry	8	8	7	7	5	1	7	
	South	Highland to Chestnut	21	13	14	6	15	11	18	
	North	Cherry to Waltham	4	2	1	3	4	3	3	
	South	D. Donuts to opp Dunstan	27	24	23	13	8	10	10	
	North	Bens coffee to Dunstan	28	17	17	11	10	5	7	
	South	opp Dunstan to opp Armory	34	17	20	13	21	7	2	
	North	Dunstan to Armory	17	12	12	8	14	5	3	
Chestnut St										
	East	W.Washington to pike	14	6	14	1	5	3	3	
	East	Washington to Turnpike	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Davis St										
	North	Chestnut to Highland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	South	Chestnut to Highland	20	19	19	12	10	20	17	
Highland Ave										
	West	W.Washington to pike	11	7	6	8	11	11	0	
Waltham St										
	West	Washington to Webster	8	8	5	2	1	5	5	
	East	Washington to opp Webster	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
Webster St.										
	North	Waltham to Cherry	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
	South	Waltham to Cherry	15	0	0	4	3	0	6	
	North	Cherry to Elm	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
	South	Cherry to Elm	3	2	4	4	2	2	0	
	North	Elm to Border	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
	South	Elm to Border	24	0	1	0	0	8	0	
Cherry St.										
	West	Webster to Washington	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
	East	Webster to Washington	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
Elm St.										
	West	Webster to Washington	14	8	15	4	5	6	4	
	East	Webster to Washington	10	7	11	3	7	9	0	
Border St										
	North	Elm to Harvey	18	18	22	6	6	10	5	
	South	Elm to Harvey	19	23	30	12	2	12	2	
	North	Harvey to bend	16	3	4	4	2	1	4	
	South	Harvey to bend	12	8	6	1	0	1	2	
	West	bend to Webster	8	6	6	0	0	0	0	
	East	bend to Webster	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	

Parking Lots

Turnpike Owned Lots

Turnpike opposite BBQ	58	60	73	47	48	18	21	38
Turnpike exit ramp	207	69	67	52	6	6	5	

Public Lots

Post office public	22	10	13	10	11	11	14	16
between Cherry & Elm	72	53	65	36	44	45	33	

Private Lots

CVS building	97	65	85	48	56	33	34	48
Post office private	22	22	10	17	14	7	13	19
lot @ Webster & Cherry	19	3	2	0	1	3	6	
Sovereign Bank Lot	62	14	22	17	41	46	59	

APPENDIX C: PARKING TURNOVER

Number of vehicles found to be parked in the same location during multiple checks of parked cars in West Newton on November 8.

Street	Side	Block	All 4	3-AM	3-PM	2-A	2-B	2-C
Watertown St								
	South	Bens to opp Eden	0	0	0	0	0	0
	North	CVS to Eden	0	0	2	0	0	
	South	opp Eden to opp Davis	0	0	0	7	0	0
	North	Eden to Davis	0	2	0	2	1	0
	South	opp Davis to opp Adell	0	2	0	1	1	0
	North	Davis to Adell	1	0	0	0	0	3
Washington St								
	South	Dunkin Donuts to opp Dunstan	2	3	0	13	2	0
	North	Bens coffee to Dunstan	0	5	0	4	0	2
	South	opp Dunstan to opp Armory	3	4	0	6	1	2
	North	Dunstan to Armory	1	2	0	4	0	2
Davis St	South	Chestnut to Highland	0	5	0	12	0	2
Turnpike Lot	opposite	BBQ7	30	3	14	1	1	

Key

- All 4 Cars parked in the same spot during all four parking checks
- 3-AM Cars parked in the same spot during checks at 9:30, 12:00 & 17:00
- 3-PM Cars parked in the same spot during checks at 12:00, 17:00 & 19:45
- 2-A Cars parked in the same spot during checks at 9:30 & 12:00
- 2-B Cars parked in the same spot during checks at 12:00 & 17:00
- 2-C Cars parked in the same spot during the checks at 17:00 & 19:45

APPENDIX D: SAMPLES OF DESIGN GUIDELINES AND ZONING TECHNIQUES

Below is a sample of design guidelines from Hinsdale, IL, which may be relevant to West Newton.

Basis for having design review: Special character, local atmosphere, compatibility, transitional areas, attractiveness, strong economy, education, pleasure, and welfare.

Characteristics reviewed:

- Open Spaces
- Materials
- General Design
- General Site Development
- Height
- Proportion of Front Façade
- Proportion of Openings
- Rhythm of Solids to Voids in Front
- Facades
- Rhythm of Entrance Porch and Other Projections
- Relationship of Materials and Texture.
- Roof Shapes
- Walls of Continuity
- Scale of Building
- Directional Expression of Front Elevation

Knoxville, TN, incorporates the idea of different allowable uses for the core area ground level, core area upper level/s, peripheral area. For details, refer to their website at <http://www.knoxmpc.org/zoning/cityzone/a4s24.htm>

Gurnee, IL, uses an overlay district as opposed to a separate zone to assign village center designation. Details are available at: http://www.gurnee.il.us/building/zoning_ord/05.html#5.2a

REFERENCES

Bibliography:

City of Cambridge, Community Development Department. 2000. *Report of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee*.

City of Newton, Framework Committee. 2001. *A Framework for Newton's Planning*: pp1-42.

City of Newton, Planning and Development Department. 1999. *Friday Report 10/15/99*.

Jacobs, Allan B., *Great Streets*. 1993. MIT Press, Cambridge MA: pp269-308.

Marsh, William M. 1998. *Landscape Planning: Environmental Applications, 3rd Edition*. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York NY.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council. 2001. *Profiles of General Demographics Characteristics: Census 2000*.

Links:

<http://www.bostonmainstreets.com/about.htm>

<http://dolanpond.8m.com/>

http://www.gurnee.il.us/building/zoning_ord/05.html#5.2a

<http://vil.hinsdale.il.us/files/designrvw.pdf>

<http://www.islandneighborhood.org/documents/RiverRfp.htm>

<http://www.knoxmpc.org/zoning/cityzone/a4s24.htm>